Your notes

GCSE Music: revision notes

Rhythms of the World: India and Punjab

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Indian classical music

- Indian classical music is built on a **raga**: a set of notes with its own shape, mood and often a time of day. A **raga** is like a scale and a melody idea at once.
- The rhythm follows a **tala**: a cycle of beats that repeats. Teental has 16 beats. The first beat of the cycle is the sam, where performers often meet up.
- A **drone** plays under the music, often on the tanpura, holding the main notes of the **raga**.
- Instruments: **sitar** (a long-necked plucked instrument with sympathetic strings), sarod, bansuri (bamboo flute), sarangi (bowed) and **tabla** (a pair of drums: the small dayan and the larger bayan).

How a raga performance unfolds

- **Alap**: slow, with no pulse. The soloist explores the notes of the **raga** over the **drone**.
- Jor: a steady pulse begins, still without drums, and the music speeds up.
- Jhala: fast and exciting, with rapid strumming of the **drone** strings.
- Gat (or bandish when sung): a composed melody with the **tabla** joining in the **tala**. Much of the performance is improvised.

Bhangra

- Bhangra began as folk dance music in the Punjab (in India and Pakistan), danced to celebrate the harvest at Vaisakhi.
- Its heart is the **dhol**, a big double-headed drum played with two sticks, playing the chaal rhythm. The **tumbi** (a one-string plucked instrument) plays catchy riffs. Singers and dancers shout calls such as "hoi!".

- British bhangra (from the 1980s, by Punjabi communities in the UK) mixed bhangra with pop, hip hop, reggae and electronic dance music: drum machines, synthesisers, samples and Punjabi lyrics.
- To tell them apart: a **drone**, **raga** and **tabla** mean Indian classical; a pounding dhol, tumbi and party shouts mean bhangra.

Your notes

Key terms

Raga	The set of notes, mood and melody shape that Indian classical music is built on.
Tala	A repeating cycle of beats in Indian music.
Sam	The first beat of the tala cycle.
Drone	Long held notes underneath the music.
Sitar	An Indian long-necked plucked instrument with sympathetic strings.
Tabla	A pair of Indian hand drums.
Alap	The slow, free opening of a raga performance with no pulse.
Dhol	A large double-headed drum played with sticks in bhangra.
Tumbi	A one-string plucked instrument used in bhangra.

Quick questions

Cover the answers and test yourself: remembering is what makes it stick.

1. What is a raga?
2. What is a tala?
3. What is the sam?
4. Which instrument usually plays the drone?
5. What is the tabla?
6. What happens in the alap?
7. Which section of a raga performance is fast and exciting, with rapid strumming?
8. Where does bhangra come from?

Answers

1. The set of notes, mood and melody shape a piece is built on
2. A repeating cycle of beats
3. The first beat of the tala cycle
4. Tanpura
5. A pair of Indian hand drums
6. The soloist explores the raga slowly, with no pulse
7. Jhala
8. The Punjab, in India and Pakistan

What to do next

Practise 10 questions on this topic

Try 3 exam questions, with mark schemes

Read the lesson, one step at a time

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